

SC008485

Registered provider: Choices Home for Children

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This children's home is privately owned. It is registered to provide care for up to five children who may have social and emotional difficulties. At the time of the inspection, five children were living in the home.

The manager was registered with Ofsted in February 2023.

Inspection dates: 30 and 31 May 2023

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **inadequate**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **inadequate**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **inadequate**

There are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded and/or the care and experiences of children and young people are poor and they are not making progress.

Date of last inspection: 12 January 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
12/01/2023	Full	Requires improvement to be good
20/09/2022	Full	Inadequate
08/09/2021	Full	Requires improvement to be good
07/07/2021	Full	Inadequate

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

Children's experiences are varied. Some children have lived in the home for several years and are making progress. However, poor decision-making about children coming to live in the home has had a detrimental impact on all the children living there.

Staff do not understand children's individual needs. Leaders and managers have not ensured that staff are aware of children's needs or that they have the skills to respond to individual needs or group living dynamics. A child's independent reviewing officer said, '[Name of child] has been negatively impacted by new children coming to live at the home.'

Children do not always feel listened to. Despite efforts by the registered manager to regularly meet with children to seek their views, there has been limited action from these meetings. Children had requested to see their written care records but there is currently no evidence that children have been given this opportunity. Children's voices are not reflected in their records.

Children's bedrooms are not furnished to an acceptable standard. They lack storage and children are not supported to unpack their belongings. Not all children have been able to personalise their rooms. One child's request to change the light fitting, that had been chosen by a previous child, had not been acted on. This does not help children to develop a sense of belonging in the home or help them to feel valued.

There have been some improvements to communal areas in the home since the last inspection. A new kitchen has been fitted and the living room provides children with a homely and welcoming space to spend time and eat together.

Children are supported to access health services. Experienced staff are helping one child to manage their health condition. But not all new staff have received training to enable them to understand the child's condition. Staff and managers do not know how to respond to children's mental health needs and children are being cared for by staff who are not suitably trained to look after them.

Staff support children to attend their education provisions. However, plans for children who are not attending formal education are not robust. This limits children's future employment opportunities and aspirations.

Children say that they have good relationships with staff. These relationships enable children to develop their confidence and self-esteem. Children are supported to engage in a range of individual and group activities. This gives children new experiences and opportunities to have fun.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: inadequate

Significant shortfalls were identified around safeguarding practices in the home. Children's risks and vulnerabilities are not well understood. They are not identified in children's risk or behaviour management plans. This means that staff do not have the information they need to support their practice or to keep children safe.

Staff were unaware of the self-injurious and complex behaviours of some children. The pre-admission assessment for one child, completed by the responsible individual, is not of sufficient quality. It does not address the child's behaviours and how other children can be safeguarded. The child has lived at the home for two months but a safety plan, identified as required in a pre-admission care planning meeting, is not in place. This is poor safeguarding practice and places children at risk of harm.

Shortfalls were identified around practices to keep children safe online. As a safeguarding measure, some children are required to hand their phones in at night and staff are expected to regularly check children's phones. However, this practice is only in place during the week and children are allowed to keep their phones at weekends. This leaves children vulnerable online, and there was a lack of clarity from the team about the rationale for this inconsistent approach.

Staff do not have all the current statutory information they need from children's placing local authorities. This was raised as a requirement at the last inspection and has not been met.

Staff only hold children as a last resort to keep them safe. The registered manager has good oversight of this practice and provides a clear evaluation of each incident, following discussions with children and staff. However, the registered manager does not have effective oversight of other aspects of children's care, such as consequences for negative behaviours, room searches or direct work. This limits opportunities to ensure that practice is appropriate and to identify any learning.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

Management arrangements in the home are negatively impacting the quality of care provided to children. The registered manager and responsible individual, both of whom are still relatively new to the home, are not working together coherently and constructively. They gave conflicting accounts about decisions for children to move into the home and about whether notice has been served on one child's placement. This lack of clear information-sharing about children means that staff are receiving mixed messages and are unable to care for all children effectively.

Leaders and managers have failed to ensure that the requirements from the last inspection, most of which were restated from the previous inspection, have been met. The registered manager's quality of care report does not fully reflect the challenges some children are facing. Leaders and managers give an overly optimistic

view of progress for children and progress towards meeting the statutory requirements from previous inspections.

The registered manager has taken action to address the previous culture of the home, when the approach of some staff was not child-centred. As a result, the atmosphere in the home is more positive and staff are spending more time with children. The quality of relationships between children and staff has improved.

Staff, including the registered manager, are not receiving formal supervision of their practice, in line with the provider's supervision policy. The registered manager has had one formal supervision since the last inspection. Written records of this meeting are brief and do not evidence any meaningful support or challenge. Staff in their probation period are not having more frequent supervision meetings, as detailed in the supervision policy. As a result, opportunities to support staff to understand and meet the needs of children have been missed. The frequency and quality of supervision has been a statutory requirement at the last four inspections of the home.

Records of team meetings are brief. As a result, it is unclear if detailed discussions about children take place in these meetings. Staff not present do not have the written information required to understand the nature of discussions and any impact on their practice or responsibilities.

Leaders and managers have not ensured that all staff understand or can meet the needs of children. Several staff, including the registered manager, are not up to date with their mandatory training. Not all staff have had training to meet the health needs of one child who has type 1 diabetes. No training is offered to staff in relation to supporting children who display sexually harmful behaviours or to understand children's complex mental health needs. A member of staff told the inspector, 'We are not [mental health] professionals. We want to help but don't know how.' This leaves children at risk of harm.

The registered manager works well with some children's placing authorities to discuss children's needs and plan their care. The social worker for one child said that the registered manager has taken time to collate information about the child to understand their life story.

The registered manager has not ensured that the home's statement of purpose has been updated and shared with Ofsted in a timely manner, as required by regulation.

What does the children's home need to do to improve?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, The Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and the 'Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards'. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
*The protection of children standard is that children are protected from harm and enabled to keep themselves safe. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff— assess whether each child is at risk of harm, taking into account information in the child's relevant plans, and, if necessary, make arrangements to reduce the risk of any harm to the child. understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children that are assigned to them by the registered person; that the home's day-to-day care is arranged and delivered so as to keep each child safe and to protect each child effectively from harm. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i)(v)(b)) Specifically, the registered person must ensure that: children's risk management plans, including pre-admission and risk reduction plans, are up to date and accurately represent children's identified risks, and children's assessments and plans provide staff with the information they need to undertake their roles and responsibilities effectively in protecting children; staff understand the risks to children as identified in their risk management and risk reduction plans and have the skills and knowledge to implement this information in their practice. This requirement was made at the last inspection and is restated.	2 July 2023

*The leadership and management standard is that the registered person enables, inspires and leads a culture in relation to the children's home that— helps children aspire to fulfil their potential; and promotes their welfare. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child; understand the impact that the quality of care provided in the home is having on the progress and experiences of each child and use this understanding to inform the development of the quality of care provided in the home use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(c)(f)(h)) Specifically, the registered person must ensure that: all staff have training in relation to caring for children with type 1 diabetes and children who may demonstrate sexually harmful behaviours; are up to date with mandatory training, have specialist training and ongoing support to inform their care of a child with complex emotional health needs, and implement new learning in practice where possible; there is evidence in children's care records that there is regular evaluation of the quality of care for children by leaders and managers and that leaders and managers are using their quality of care report to evaluate children's progress and experiences and implement plans to improve practice; robust systems are in place to ensure that there is effective oversight of practice in the home.	2 July 2023
*The registered person must ensure that all employees— receive practice-related supervision by a person with appropriate experience. (Regulation 33 (4)(b))	2 July 2023

Specifically, that the registered person must ensure that all staff receive good-quality supervision of their practice at the frequency detailed in the organisation's supervision policy and from a person with the appropriate experience to do so. This requirement was made at the last inspection and is restated.	
The care planning standard is that children— receive effectively planned care in or through the children's home; and have a positive experience of arriving at or moving on from the home. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that arrangements are in place to— manage and review the placement of each child in the home that staff help each child to access and contribute to the records kept by the registered person in relation to the child. (Regulation 14 (1)(a)(b) (2)(b)(ii)(c)(f))	31 July 2023
The registered person must maintain records ("case records") for each child which— include the information and documents listed in Schedule 3 in relation to each child; are kept up to date; and are signed and dated by the author of each entry. (Regulation 36 (1)(a)(b)(c)) This requirement was made at the last inspection and is restated.	31 July 2023
The quality and purpose of care standard is that children receive care from staff who— understand the children's home's overall aims and the outcomes it seeks to achieve for children;	2 July 2023

use this understanding to deliver care that meets children's needs and supports them to fulfil their potential. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— ensure that staff— provide to children living in the home the physical necessities they need in order to live there comfortably ensure that the premises used for the purposes of the home are designed and furnished so as to— meet the needs of each child (Regulation 6 (1)(a)(b) (2)(b)(vii)(c)(i)) Specifically, the registered person must ensure that children have adequate storage for their clothes and personal belongings; that bedrooms are furnished in a way which gives children space to move around freely; that children are consulted about their bedrooms and swift action is taken to address any shortfalls.	
The registered person must— keep the statement of purpose under review and, where appropriate, revise it; and notify HMCI of any revisions and send HMCI a copy of the revised statement within 28 days of the revision. (Regulation 16 (3)(a)(b))	31 July 2023

*These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people, using the social care common inspection framework. This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with The Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and the 'Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards'.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC008485

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Choices Home for Children

Registered provider address: 31 Wellington Road, Nantwich, Cheshire CW5 7ED

Responsible individual: Linda Heywood

Registered manager: Richard Dolan

Inspector

Dawn Parton, Social Care Inspector

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